

REPORT OF THE ELLIS MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Ah, Middle School...an interesting time in the lives of children and a unique opportunity to work with these very talented, fun, and unique children. During the month of October the students and staff celebrated The Month of the Young Adolescent by doing different projects to show what teenagers would like others to know about them. Classes did community service, talked about activities they enjoy like sports, and presented information to break down stereotypes associated with adolescents.

At Ellis School, our Middle School program has grades five through eight. We are working toward making our Middle School program reflect the most successful school for young adolescents as stated by the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS). We continue to work on the recommendations from NELMS, who did an assessment of our programs in 2004.

The goals we are working on include:

- Educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so.
- Courageous, collaborative leadership.
- A shared vision that guides decisions.
- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment.
- High expectations for every member of the learning community.
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning.
- An adult advocate for every student.
- School-initiated family and community partnerships.

The following information will show you how we are working on those goals.

Leadership - This year began with two principals instead of one. I am extremely pleased to be the principal of the Middle School. Being able to concentrate on one group has had positive effects for everyone. I am able to really know the students and follow their progress over the course of four years. I am also able to know parents and families and work with them. I can be proactive and visible around the building. I am able to respond quicker to concerns and issues. I am able to work closer with teachers and staff on curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Learning Environment - We continue with our three expectations of: Being Prepared, Being Responsible, and Being Respectful. We had great success with our Gold Card system from last year and have continued with that program. The Gold Card is a Middle School student's ticket to all events and activities. That status is only given to students that are consistently meeting the expectations mentioned above. Students who have lost that status due to behavioral situations can be reinstated by completing a restitution plan. The restitution plan is what the student will do to make up for their behavior. This plan is much more effective at changing student behavior in a positive manner and teaching students to make better choices than detention or suspensions.

This year students earn Ellis Dollars for meeting the expectations in addition to the Gold Card. Students can use these dollars for a special event each month. Some of the events have included a raffle, Fun Night, and special field trips.

We are using our data collected by the behavior referral forms to make decisions. The data can tell us what time of day situations occur, where they happen, what type of behavior is involved, etc. By reviewing that information, we are able to target our resources and change those situations to make the school better and safer. This data also shows us that referrals to the office for behavior have been cut in half since last year.

Students are enjoying the new playground for Middle School students. The Student Advisory Committee, a group of all student representation, chose the equipment that would appeal most to this age group. The Rock, Spacenet, and other equipment are getting good use everyday as the students have their physical break and recess time.

Curriculum and Programs for Middle School Students - A cross grade level group of teachers has aligned our Social Studies and Science to match New Hampshire's Frameworks. These disciplines are now aligned from grades 1 through 8 so that we are being consistent and not repeating content for many years in a row, nor are we leaving out important areas. We will finish alignment of Language Arts before the year is out. Math has already been aligned.

We are working with a Reading Consultant from Tufts University on our reading program. This work is grant funded and will help us to align our reading curriculum. Plus we will be able to ensure that we are using the best researched based instructional strategies to teach reading .

We were able to add a World Cultures course for our seventh and eighth graders. This course was added to begin to prepare our students to work with others in this global society. The course introduces students to different cultures around the world by studying and comparing the components of culture such as their history, government, arts, language, technology, etc. with our culture.

The Unified Arts team is doing block scheduling for our seventh and eighth graders. During the second semester instead of going to Unified Arts once a week, the classes will meet in one area every day for 2 ½ weeks. This will allow students to do an in depth study of music, art, health, Physical Education, computers, and library. The team is also planning a Fine Arts Show in the spring that will showcase the many talents of our youngsters through art, dance, music, dramatic pieces, and other performances.

Our music program has been enhanced under the leadership of our new musical director, Mrs. Cocco. A performing chorus has been added and a new jazz band will begin in the spring. Seventh and eighth grade students are learning keyboarding skills and sixth grade will begin learning to play the guitar.

All Middle School teachers are working on interdisciplinary units where all the disciplines are focused on one major unit of study. The seventh and eighth grade students completed a unit on forensic science which culminated with a visit from the state pathologist. The sixth grade students learned about political parties by designing their own party complete with platforms, speeches, and an election. The fifth grade studied Native Americans and had a

Powwow at the Fremont Athletic Field complete with authentic Native American food and games.

At the Middle School level, we have been able to offer the following in terms of extra-curricular activities that are vital for Middle School students to be involved in. We have been able to expand those offerings this year.

- Sports which include co-ed volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, track, baseball, and softball.
- Kool Krew—dance group
- Drama
- After school activity time which includes homework assistance and games such as chess, checkers, backgammon, etc.
- Eagle League Intramural sports which includes basketball, volleyball, and floor hockey.

Technology - Ellis School is now wireless! This means that staff and students can work on projects, do research, and communicate with parents from anywhere in the building. Access to the Internet is available to community members from Ellis School.

We have also incorporated a new student database that makes keeping student information for emergencies, attendance, report cards, and school records easier and more accurate.

Grant funding allowed for the acquisition of laptop computers for each teacher in the building. This allows teachers to complete lessons, find resources and do research for units of study, communicate to parents through email, and use for instruction in the classroom. Plus with the wireless access, teachers can do their work anywhere in the building saving time.

Wellness Committee - According to Federal law and our own Fremont School Board policy, we are required to have a Wellness Committee. This committee had the task of assessing our wellness practices at Ellis School in terms of nutrition, physical movement, and other wellness areas. By July 1, 2006, the group will also have to recommend a Wellness Policy for School Board to consider in those areas.

The group has assessed our current health practices. Using that data, the committee has been writing the Wellness procedures to recommend to the Fremont School Board. The procedures will include goals for nutrition education, physical education, mental/emotional/social health education, and other wellness promoting areas. The policy will also have a way to evaluate if the policy is being implemented and the results.

In Closing

I would be remiss in this report not to mention the unbelievable staff at the Middle School. Your children and I are privileged to come each day and work with people who are dedicated, knowledgeable, skilled, caring, professionals who really understand and enjoy Middle School students. These educators show a determination to provide learning that is developmentally appropriate and engaging for young adolescents. They serve as exemplary role

models and advocates for each student. They are the “best kept secret” in New Hampshire, and we have them here in Fremont!

Respectfully,

Kelli R. Killen
Middle School Principal

Ellis School Library

Photo courtesy of Kelli Killen